

# Children and alcohol don't mix. Here's what to do

John Toumbourou  
March 2, 2008

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Why are our children misusing alcohol? The three Ps are parents, peers and products.

Although the influences are complex, parents play an important role. The national school survey showed that at age 12, three-quarters of alcohol use occurred under adult supervision.

Many parents act with the best of intentions, supervising children's alcohol use to encourage moderation. The problem is the strategy is not working and children who start using alcohol at an early age are more likely to go on to become part of the adolescent party culture in which alcohol use occurs regularly.

Regular alcohol use in adolescence predicts more alcohol problems in early adulthood.

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In recent research our team found that reaching puberty acted to increase the risk of substance use by increasing the tendency for young people to want to affiliate with and fit in with peers.

At the time that adolescents are drinking alcohol to attract their peers, their brains are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of alcohol. An important solution to reducing peer pressure is education to help young people understand the impact of alcohol and the social pressures that can lead to misuse.

Products are also an important component in underage alcohol use. The large number of underage drinkers means that there is now an assertive market that caters to this group. A variety of cheap, brightly coloured and sweet alcoholic drinks can be easily accessed by underage drinkers.

There are two strategies that would effectively reduce the underage market.

The first would require the Federal Government to increase the price of alcohol. Making alcohol more expensive would have a greater impact on the underage market than the adult market. If price control were introduced in the form of a health tax on alcohol, the money could be used to support independent health-promoting organisations such as the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation and VicHealth.

The second strategy would require the State Government to change legislation restricting alcohol sales and marketing. Since the early 1970s, every state has engaged in a process of liberalising liquor licensing laws.

Victoria has led this movement with the effect that our state has experienced the most dramatic increase in the number of licensed venues over the past 20 years and a greater rate of increase in alcohol-related harm. The international evidence is also clear that increasing the legal age for the purchase and use of alcohol to 21 can reduce the age of use and subsequent harms.

Monitoring studies have shown that when the drinking age was reduced from 21 to 18 across Australian states in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the alcohol-related harm experienced by young people crept up.

This has been a consistent finding internationally when the legal drinking age has been reduced.

Also, when the legal drinking age has been increased towards 21 there have been substantial reductions in youth alcohol use and alcohol-related harm.

It is interesting to reflect on how the three Ps interrelate.

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However, to get politicians to change the law it comes back to the parents who vote them in.

*John Toumbourou is professor of health psychology at Deakin University and works for the Murdoch Children's Research Institute.*

*This story was found at: <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2008/03/01/1204227049133.html>*

### Step One:

- identify the contention
- identify key information - author, date, newspaper, title, article type

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### opinion article

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### Step Two:

- identify the author's main arguments
- identify the tone used by author, including shifts in tone where evident.

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peer pressure partly to blame - educate children to resist

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**tone: calm, understated, informative, forthright...**

### Step Three:

- highlight main persuasive techniques used by author to sustain each argument.

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### Step Four:

- decide which main persuasive techniques you will discuss in relation to each argument.



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opinion article

inclusive language

metaphor

evidence

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opinion

generalisations

evidence - fact

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emotive language

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reason and logic

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